

Message Text

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ACTION OES-07

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 EA-10 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00
NSAE-00 NSCE-00 SSO-00 USIE-00 INRE-00 ACDA-12
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-----056845 101446Z /40

O R 101349Z MAR 78
FM AMEMBASSY LONDON
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 4001
INFO AMEMBASSY BONN
AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS
AMEMBASSY COPENHAGEN
AMEMBASSY DUBLIN
AMEMBASSY LUXEMBOURG
AMEMBASSY OTTAWA
AMEMBASSY PARIS
AMEMBASSY ROME
AMEMBASSY THE HAGUE
AMEMBASSY TOKYO
AMEMBASSY VIENNA

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USEEC ALSO FOR EMBASSY
USOECN ALSO FOR EMBASSY
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E.O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: ENRG, TECH, UK
SUBJECT: WINDSCALE AND REPROCESSING OF NUCLEAR FUEL

REF: LONDON 3660

1. THE PARLIAMENTARY DEBATE ON THE EXPANSION OF THE
BRITISH NUCLEAR FUELS LTD (BNFL) REPROCESSING FACILITIES
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AT WINDSCALE WILL TAKE PLACE DURING THE WEEK BEFORE
EASTER, POSSIBLY ON MARCH 22. ON THAT DATE, THE DEBATE
WILL FOCUS ON THE PLANNING INQUIRY REPORT (REFTEL) AND
NO PARLIAMENTARY VOTE WILL TAKE PLACE. ENVIRONMENT
SECRETARY SHORE WILL SOON THEREAFTER, POSSIBLY BY MARCH
30, TABLE A SPECIAL DEVELOPMENT ORDER (SDO) WHICH WOULD
LEGALIZE THE EXPANSION. UNDER THIS SPECIAL PROCEDURE,

PARLIAMENT WILL THEN HAVE 40 DAYS IN WHICH TO DECIDE WHETHER IT WISHES TO DEBATE AND VOTE ON THE SDO. OBSERVERS HERE BELIEVE SUCH A DEBATE AND VOTE WILL OCCUR. THE PROCEDURE LIMITS PARLIAMENTARY CONSIDERATION TO THE ENTIRETY OF THE SDO. THUS, VOTING IS CONFINED TO THE PROPOSAL AS A WHOLE AND NOT TO ITS DETAILS. IF THE RESULTING VOTE APPROVES THE PROJECT (SEEN AS LIKELY), THE FIRBL HMG APPROVAL TO BNFL WOULD BE EFFECTIVE ON 10 MAY. COMMENT: EMBOFFS VISITED BNFL THIS WEEK, AND OFFICIALS THERE CLEARLY EXPECT TO BREAK GROUND AS SOON AS POSSIBLE AFTER FINAL APPROVAL HAS BEEN RECEIVED. INTERESTINGLY, FOREIGN SECRETARY OWEN AND NOT ENERGY SECRETARY BENN WILL MAKE THE WIND-UP SPEECH FOR THE GOVERNMENT IN THE INITIAL DEBATE. THIS SUGGESTS THAT HMG SEES THE INTERNATIONAL NON-PROLIFERATION ISSUE AS A KEY TO THE PARLIAMENTARY DECISION.

2. THE EXPANSION INVOLVES THE ADDITION OF AN ENTIRELY NEW UNIT, THORP I. EFFECTIVE CAPACITY OF THIS 1,200 METRIC TON PER YEAR THERMAL OXIDE REPROCESSING PLANT, BASED ON ESTIMATED 50 PERCENT DOWN TIME, IS 600 MT. OF THIS, 300 MT IS CURRENTLY COMMITTED FOR U.K. OXIDE FUEL AND 300 MT IS RESERVED FOR FOREIGN CONTRACTS. THE PLANT WOULD BE EXPECTED TO BEGIN OPERATING IN 1987 AND BE ON FULL STREAM IN 1989. COOLING POND EXPANSIONS FOR STORAGE OF SPENT FUEL WOULD BE UNDERTAKEN MUCH EARLIER, LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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WITH MUCH OF THAT CAPACITY COMPLETED BY 1984. SINCE THE QUANTITY OF OXIDE FUEL EXPECTED TO BE AVAILABLE FOR REPROCESSING BY 1989 MAY EXCEED THE 300 MT CAPACITY ALLOTTED TO U.K. FUEL, SOME NEED FOR FURTHER CAPACITY IN THE FORM OF A THORP II AT WINDSCALE MAY BE FELT SOON AND IS REGARDED AS INEVITABLE IN THE LONG TERM. BREWSTER

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